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To: suedickenson@yahoo.com

Date: Tue, 3 Apr 2007 20:13:14 -0600

Subject: gambling

From: "Bob W Piccolo" <bpiccolo@juno.com>

Dear Representative Dickenson:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on increasing awareness of the gambling problem. As a clinical social worker I have been working with the Montana Council on Problem Gambling for the last 3 years. The Council reimburses me for doing treatment groups, assessments, individual therapy, and work with families affected by problem gambling. The Council is funded by casinos, primarily Town Pump, and has worked to establish a network of counselors in Montana. There are also two private treatment centers in Montana that provide help for compulsive gamblers, Rimrock in Billings, and St. Patrick's in Missoula. These are of course usually prohibitively expensive for those with a gambling problem, unless they can get help from family. To the best of my knowledge there is no help whatsoever from the state.

It seems to me that the public currently tends not to understand that gambling addiction is very real and very serious. The common thought seems to be, "why don't you just quit." Problem gamblers themselves often seem to share this idea, and are angry and frustrated that they can't just quit. If it is hard for them to accept their addiction it is often even more difficult for families, friends, and employers. Yet gambling can and does devastate lives, leading to financial ruin, divorce, legal problems, and sometimes suicide. Often I think my own attempts at treatment fail, and I believe that more readily available inpatient treatment might help.

I can't say that I have really reviewed the available research on problem gambling. What I have read, while perhaps useful, doesn't seem to reflect the situation we have here in Montana. Here, we seem to have a form of escape gambling focused almost entirely on gambling machines. While this may be harmless for most people, some unfortunate ones seem to slip into a growing obsession with playing the machines, especially the keno machines. Just in my own experience I have not had any people whose problem was in anything other than machines, even including live poker. The gambling addiction seems to develop very rapidly in some instances, and seems to be exacerbated by stress, interpersonal problems, and so on.

The small neighborhood casinos we have can seem to provide a refuge to people.

In any case I believe it would be a very helpful first step to find out the true nature of the gambling problem in Montana: the numbers of people addicted, trends, effects on the economy and the community,

impacts on the legal system, what effective treatments there could be, who might pay for treatments, and so on. Again, thank you for your interest.

Bob Piccolo